

THE IMAGES OF WIT AND HUMOUR IN KĀLIDĀSA'S
AND ŚŪDRAKA'S DRAMAS

The imagery of the epics, lyrics and verse portions of the dramas of Kālidāsa generally draws upon the traditional poetical symbolism of Sanskrit *kāvya* but structured and transmuted into a form endowed with characteristics which could be justifiably called « classical ». In contrast the images of dramatic prose, which is mainly the medium of expression of the Vidūṣaka and of characters of inferior rank speaking Prakrit, reflect not only differences in social strata but convey also a distinction in the actual tone and substance based on the distinction in speech. We may refer to this form of imagery as « popular » to distinguish it from the sophisticated form of poetic imagery referred to above and also to identify it from the point of view of its source. This imagery is full of wit and humour and what marks it off from the serious is its spontaneous expressiveness with no deliberate attempt at artistic effect. The present Paper will examine the nature and characteristic features of the « popular » imagery of Kālidāsa's dramas and also take up for discussion the relevant aspects of imagery in Śūdraka's drama, *Mṛcchakaṭika*, for purposes of comparison.

The Vidūṣaka who enlivens the drama with his piquant humour and quickens its movement to the denouement is the mainspring of the imagery we propose to analyse now. The metaphors and similes he uses are accordingly tinged with irony and sarcasm. Spread all over the drama are many of the Vidūṣaka's food images, typically reflecting his greediness and gluttony. His fondness for sugar makes him compare the moon to a lump of sugar, chopped off.

Hī hī bho khandamodaasassirio udido rāā duādinam (*Vikromarvīśīya*, Act III).

A wider connotation of meaning accompanies the expression describing Mālavikā as she appears to the king's view, the statement effectively uttered in such a way that it is not meant to be heard fully by the

king, who is madly in love with her. The simile is based on the customary practice of eating granulated sugar as an antidote against intoxication.

Hī hī iam khu sīhupānuvvejida sā macchāndiā uvanadā (*Mālavikāgnimitra*, III).

Or the *Vidūṣaka* describes his restlessness and unbearable pangs of hunger in terms of an oven (*Mlv.* II). *Kālidāsa* takes the opportunity of the *Vidūṣaka*'s garrulousness to ridicule, bitingly, the gormandising brahmin with a seemingly innocent simile.

Hī hī bho nimantaño paramannena via rāarahassena phuṭṭamāno na sakkuṇomi ainne attano jīham rakkhidum (*Vik.* II).

His humour is as sparkling as his acquaintaintance with varied tastes of foods. He derisively draws a parallel between the king's preference of *Sakuntalā* to the harem ladies and the desire for tamarind when one is satiated with dates (*Sak.* II).

As the companion of the king in his romantic adventures he provokes the audience to bursts of lugher harping on the king's maddening passion much to his patron's embarrassment. In several situations he imagines himself as a physician ministering to the king in his disease.

Bho ahallakāmuassa mahindassa vejjo uvvasīpajjucchassa bhavado ahaṇvi duve ettha ummattaā (*Vik.* II).

Elsewhere the *Vidūṣaka* who has been at his wit's end arranging the presentation of *Mālavikā* to the king, notices distressingly that he has to perform the unenviable task of a go-between bringing together the king and his lady love in the manner of a physician coming to a patient with medicine, himself (*Mlv.* II).

Images expressive of the acts of plundering, theiving and grabbing are very well chosen to portray the behaviour of the king caught making love to his mistress. The *Vidūṣaka* comes out with an illustration from the robber's vocabulary to describe the king caught red-handed professing his love to *Mālavikā*.

Padijāhi dāṇim kiṇpi. Kammagahidena kumbhīlaena samdhicchede sikkhiommitti vattavvam hodi (*Mlv.* III).

The love-letter from *Urvaśī* drops from the *Vidūṣaka*'s hand and as ill-luck would have it, it reaches the queen who presents it to the doting king. The *Vidūṣaka* cannot explain the awkward corner they are in except by presenting the king as a robber seized with the booty (*Vik.* II). The king, timid and hesitant, though deeply enamoured of *Mālavikā* is likened to a bird hovering round a slaughter house, yet afraid to grab the meat.

... Bhavam vi sūṇoparicaro vihaṅgamo via āmisaloluo bhīruo a (*Mlv.* II).

Mālavikā appears with the dancing tutor for the performance before all including the queen. As the king ogles at her the Vidūṣaka whispers into his ear and cautions him to collect the honey unnoticed by the guardian bee (the queen).

Bho uvvat̄tidam naṇamadhu saṇṇihidamakkhiam a (Mlv. II).

Act VI of the *Śakuntalā* begins with the racy and pithy exchange

of words between the fisherman and the king's officers leading to the discovery of the ring. On being exculpated by the king's decree, the fisherman is full of wit and repartee in his pungent counter-attacks on the officers. The dialogue is an example of sustained irony and sarcasm conducive to imagery at the popular level. A characteristic feature of such imagery is its decidedly gnomic touch. Thus when the alleged thief (the fisherman) is found innocent the policeman ironically refers to the fellow's escape from death.

Eṣe jamaśadanam paviśia paṇīṇivutte (*Śak.* VI).

The fisherman does not fail to retort squarely.

Eṣe nāma anuggahe je śūlādo avadālia hatthikkhandhe padīṭhābide (*Ibid.* VI).

These expressions in their terseness remind us of the maxims and epigrammatic statements occurring in the verse portions of the *Pañcatantra* as well as in the verses of the *nīti* genre. Presumably the above common characteristics shared by these literary forms denote the source from which the language, idiom and folk nature springs — the common folk.

The brevity of the statements is marked. The well-known adage that trouble comes not single is transformed in the Vidusaka's jargon into

Tado gaṇḍassa uvari pindiā samvuttā (*Śak.* II).

When the nun is asked to adjudicate in the musical contest between the tutors she expresses her inability tauntingly, in a rustic idiom,

Paṭṭane vidyamāne'pi grāme ratnaparikṣā (Mlv. I).

By the Vidūṣaka's ruse Mālavikā escapes captivity but only to walk into another trap, a situation which reminds the Vidūṣaka of the proverb,

Aho aṇatthe sampadide. Bandhabhaṭṭo gihakavodo cillāe muhe padide
(Oh the calamity that has befallen! The house-pigeon escaped from the prison has fallen into the mouth of a kite) (Mlv. IV).

A similar bird image describes Mālavikā's victimisation by the queen-a rejoinder to the king who inquires after her welfare.

(Rājā-Ko vṛttāntas tatrabhavatyās śakhyāḥ)

Vidūṣaka-Jo bidālagahidāe parahudiāe (Mlv. IV).

(The same as that of a cuckoo caught by a cat)

The queen is constrained to allow the love-affair between the king and Urvasi to proceed. The Vidūṣaka draws the moral from the event in his characteristic lighter vein, thus

Chinnahattho macche phalāide nivvīṇno dhīvaro bhaṇādi dhammo me havissaditti (Vik. III).

As it is almost always the behaviour of the king in his relationship with the heroine that is the subject of comment by his companion, the Vidūṣaka, who in turn reveals his rustic and jovial character with his coarse wit, a short dialogue between the two of them may be reproduced to indicate their many-sided relationship.

Sore of limb and exhausted after following the king at the chase, the Vidūṣaka remains supporting himself on the staff when the king asks him why he is in a state of collapse. In this despondent mood he cannot help but illustrate his helplessness and servility with two explanatory maxims.

Rājā-Kut'yam gātropaghatah.

Vidūṣaka-Kudo kila saam acchiam aulikaria assukāraṇam pucchasi.
Rājā-Na khalv avagacchāmi.

Vidūṣaka-Bho vaassa jaṁ vedaso khujjalilam vidambedi tam kiṁ attano pahāvena. naṁ naīveassa (Sāk. II).

(Well, my friend, when the reed imitates the character of the kubja plant, is it by its own act or by the force of the stream?)

The Vidūṣaka, appearing in the *Mṛcchakaṭīka* does not possess all the characteristics with which he is commonly invested in Sanskrit drama. Śūdraka has elevated him into the position of a true companion of the hero, Cārudatta, and he therefore differs from Kālidāsa's type as he is more disciplined, restrained and devoid of greediness and idiotic ways. But Śūdraka's Vidūṣaka is not second to Kālidāsa's sometimes especially when he rattles off similes in a mood of disgust. Commenting acidly on Vasantasenā's indifference towards him in the matter of offering food, he quotes maxims or rather a chain of similes.

Akandasamutthitā pauminī avañca vāñcio acoro suvañṇārō akalaho gāmasmāgamo aluddhā gaṇīā tti dukkaram ede sambhāvanti (Mṛch. V).

(A lotus-plant that grows without a root, a tradesman that does not cheat, a goldsmith that does not steal, a village-meeting that is without a quarrel and a courtesan that is not avaricious-these are hard to be found.

Here, too, the gnomic touch is evident.

His sagely advice to Carudatta in humorous vein —

Ganiā nāma pāduantarappavīṭṭā via letṭuā dukkhena uṇa nīrākariādi (Ibid. V).

(A courtesan is just like a pebble got inside a shoe that is got rid of afterwards with great difficulty)

and his ridiculing of the courtesan as a nuisance to society (*Ibid.* V) carry the same overtones recalling the didactic trends of *nīti* versification.

The Śakāra, the villain of the drama, his friend, the Viṭa, and his servant, the Cheṭa, are portrayed as ignoble characters and their low ways of behaviour are brought out in their witticisms and figurative expressions. They always use metaphors and similes to illustrate a point and particularly to express their love or hate of Vasantasenā. The imagery is sometimes more colourful and varied than Kālidāsa's in such instances where Śūdraka adopts various devices, putting into the mouths of the different characters differing modes of figurative language. The Vidūṣaka into the background and take on the role of a fool and villain combined. His talk and behaviour provides the main element of humour in the play. He provokes laughter with his idiosyncrasies, his style of speaking (which earns for him the sobriquet *śa-kāra*), his peculiar similes and metaphors and distorted mythological allusions. In the scene where he appears for the first time, pursuing Vasantasenā with the Viṭa and the Cheṭa, he is in his true element trying various methods of enticing her, using all manner of verbal approximations and figurative epithets. Śūdraka purposely employs such figures of speech to reveal the absurdly comical nature of the man who accosts Vasantasenā thus.

*Esā nānākamūṣikāmakaśikā macchāśikā lāśikā
Ninnāsā kulaṇāśikā avaśikā kāmasya maṇjūśikā
Esā veśavahū śuveśanilāā veśāriगाना veśiā*

Eṣe śe dasa nāmake mai kale ajjāvi maṇi necchadi (I, v. 23).

The Viṭa, himself, a character of despicable habits, ridicules the Śakāra and while commenting on the latter's misunderstanding of Vasantasenā's attitude towards his friend, expresses in homilies — characteristic of the author's style — cynical observations on the class concept thus giving hopes to the Śakāra of winning her (v. 32).

Śūdraka's examples of the imagery of wit and humour which he introduces into both the Prakrit and the Sanskrit dialogues of the characters attempts to combine as if it were the classical and the popular modes of figurative description which Kālidāsa appears to have kept apart to invest his characters with their own individuality and separate identity. In Kālidāsa as well as in Śūdraka, the Vidūṣaka, Śakāra and the minor characters share the same outlook on life and to a great extent suggest the strong secular connexions of the Sanskrit drama. Śūdraka however seems to have succeeded in drawing upon a large variety of characters in whom he reflects their sense of humour leavened with a degree of cynism rarely found in Sanskrit literature.

Śūdraka's imagery has a marked didactic ring in the lofty and heart-searching sentiments of Cārudatta speaking in Sanskrit as well as in the cynical and comic utterances of the Viṭa using Prakrit to flatter

and sometimes ridicule the Śakāra. In the lines below the Viṭa makes a bitter, cynical comment on the darkness and its associations of evil, drawing out a moral from it quite elegantly

*Limpativa tamo'ṅgāni varsatīvāñjanam nabhaḥ
Asatpuruṣaseveva dṛṣṭir viphalatāṁ gatā* (I, v. 34).

Another trait of Śūdraka's method of evoking humour comes from the blundering and distortion of mythology attributed to the minor characters who are apparently not versed in the ancient lore or cite from it wrongly to further their own ends (Act I, v. 25, v. 29). Sometimes the interlocutors in a dialogue challenge each other wittily referring to the powers of the gods in certain myths (as in the scene where the gamblers quarrel with each other in Act II).

Śūdraka's ability to write in a witty manner and let the humour flow from it is evident from the beginning of the drama where the Śūtradhāra with his introductory remarks laments his lot having been forced to practice at the musical concert without refreshment in much the same way as Kālidāsa's Vidūṣaka expresses his irritation with the king who was spending long hours with Śakuntalā. Some of the characteristic features of Śūdraka's imagery are shown in the above passage among which are the skilful blending of the imagery with the mode of expression and the use of comparisons of an unusual nature.

*Cirasamgītopāsanena grīsmasamaye pracaṇḍadina karakiraṇocchuṣka-
puṣkarabija miva pracaṇḍatārake kṣudhā mamāksinī khaṭakhaṭāyate.*

In the above lines the Śūtradhāra compares his eyes under severe strain and affected by the pangs of hunger to shrivelled lotus seeds, exposed to the fierce heat of the sun. He continues to describe his predicament further using the same image in yet another way referring to his drooping limbs as resembling « parched stalks of lotuses » (*Cirasamgītopāsanena suṣkapuṣkaranālāṇīva bubhukṣayā mlānanyāṅgāni*).

In this monologue of the *Mṛcchakaṭīka* he proceeds to describe the hullabaloo in the house, capturing the confusion and disorder prevailing with unconventional similes, refreshingly humorous. The scars and streaks caused by pots and pans being dragged on the floor bring to the author's mind the features of a charming woman with a multi-coloured *tilaka* mark on her forehead. When the Śūtradhāra later calls the Naṭī (his mistress) and continues to converse the humour of the situation is elegantly maintained.

Even if one concedes that humour is an element badly neglected in Sanskrit drama yet the above instances of elegant and meaningful humour reflected in the imagery of the plays of Kālidāsa and Śūdraka show that humour (the *hāsya rasa* of the theorists) occupies its rightful place in the drama and that two of the leading dramatists in Sanskrit literature have successfully used it to depict differences in character and social

values as well. In this respect it is also significant that the ability to handle not only the Sanskrit language but the Prakrit dialects and use the idioms and nuances of expression for dramatic purposes appears to be a great asset in the hands of these two dramatists. The inter-mixing of idioms and images in the classical and popular languages also underlines the fact that despite the attempts of grammarians who strove to keep Sanskrit pure and grammatically rigid both the classical language and its literature came to be enriched by contact with the living idiom of popular speech. The images of wit and humour amply illustrate this feature.